

Pharisees - Transcript - Ryan Hutton

(He/Him/His)

Hello everyone, my name is Ryan Hutton, I use masculine pronouns, and I will be presenting on the Pharisees today. The Pharisees are a sect of Jews that has existed at least since 150 B.C.E. and have references in the Dead Sea Scrolls, New Testament, and writings of Josephus. In this presentation I will highlight some important characteristics that have separated Pharisees from other Jewish groups, explain Jesus' interaction with this group, and how the Pharisees' tradition has continued to today.

First, the Pharisees have a really interesting history prior to the second temple period. They appear in the Dead Sea Scroll in a seemingly derogatory fashion. The term Pharisee is translated into "separated" or "separatists". It is unclear whether this was a self prescribed title or one that other groups used to exclude certain types of Jews. In later years after Jesus has died, prominent followers of Christ, namely Paul, identify as Pharisee with regard to Law, which indicates that the term Pharisee had transcended its derogatory meaning from the earlier centuries.

The Pharisees as a group practiced an extreme interpretation of Torah, and unlike another group, the Sadducees, also adhered or placed importance on "the tradition of the elders" or an unwritten, oral torah that was shared by word of mouth throughout the community. The Pharisees understood that by practicing the Law correctly, God would continue to protect the people of Israel. With this in mind, the Pharisees became slightly less strict concerning the punishment of actions against the Law. The group in Qumran was opposed to this as well, saying that Pharisees were "seekers after smooth things" indicating that the Pharisees are too relaxed in their understanding and punishment of Law. The Qumranites emphasize that the Pharisees must be more strict and hard in their understanding, enactment, and punishment of the Law.

Pharisees also had a different understanding of divine intervention than other Jewish groups like the Sadducies and Essenes. Essenes maintained that all things are predestined according to God's will, while the Sadducies emphasized the concept of free will and self-determination. The Pharisees are different from both of these groups because they hold individuals responsible for their actions without denying God's involvement in the seemingly mundane happening of everyday life.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the Pharisees are a major player in the conflicts that happen in the second half of the Gospel. Jesus both praises the group, saying in Matthew 5:20 "for I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven". Jesus praises the group's strict interpretation of the Law and exalts their actions. However,

Jesus has conflict with the Pharisees and their practices of emphasizing external piety and minimizing internal piety as key to entering God's kingdom. And he says this by saying "but woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven". Jesus maintains that external piety provides a pathway to understand internal piety, but by strict observance of the Law makes people focused on their reception by other people instead of being aligned with the will of God.

While the Gospel of Matthew depicts Scribes and Pharisees as the enemy, it is unclear whether this is actually the case historically. Jesus seems to agree with Pharisaic ethics and teaching of love-lessons, but he disagrees with bodily actions leading to spiritual rewards. Many scholars believe that the anti-Pharisaic tone that occurs the Gospels are reflective of disagreements between Christians and Jews after the crucifixion of Christ: this means Jesus' anti-pharisaic comments are being added after his death when the Gospels were being written. This chronological overlap is related to modern day anti-semitism and violence

After the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, the Pharisees were the remaining Jewish religious group that was large enough to continue the Jewish tradition and influence its future. This led to Pharisaic Judaism to become the dominant form of Judaism that we have today, and many of their beliefs influenced Rabbinic Judaism that we have today.

Pharisees initially were a group of middle class Jews with a strict interpretation of the Law with regards to piety and the temple. In the Gospel of Matthew, they are Jesus' example of right action as well as the focus of his critiques of religion. The Pharisees as a group can be used to understand Judaism in the second temple period and early Christianity. Josephus and The Dead Sea Scrolls are not always the most reliable sources, but together we have an idea of what it meant to be a Pharisee both prior to and after the fall of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Bibliography

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